DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 866 PS 018 271

AUTHOR McCrea, Nadine L.
TITLE An Australian Consideration of Program Accreditation as a Way of Filling the Gap from Minimum to High Quality Standards.
INSTITUTION Brisbane Coll. of Advanced Education, Kelvin Grove (Australia). School of Early Childhood Studies.
PUB DATE Jul 89
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Early Education and Development (21st, Hong Kong, July 31-August 4, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accreditation (Institutions); *Child Caregivers; *Community Involvement; Early Childhood Education; Educational Improvement; *Educational Quality; Foreign Countries; *Program Development; Standards
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (Queensland); *Voluntary Participation

ABSTRACT

The efforts of Queensland's parents, government officials, and early childhood professionals to raise the quality of child care by developing a voluntary process for accreditation of early childhood programs are described. The envisioned accreditation process would begin with collaborative self-study by child caregivers of the extent to which their programs realized 10 program components. Each component would be defined by a goal, a brief rationale, and several criteria. Components defined were: (1) interactions among staff and children; (2) curriculum/program for children; (3) interactions between staff and parents; (4) staff qualifications and development; (5) staffing patterns; (6) physical environment and setting; (7) health and safety factors; (8) food and nutrition issues; (9) management and administration; and (10) evaluation. The self-study was to be followed by validation and consideration for accreditation. It is argued that many community benefits accrue from a voluntary program accreditation system built on clear regulations. The self-study facilitates staff development, parent education, and accountability to the community, and raises awareness of young children's needs for appropriate programs. Over 90 references are cited. (RH)

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An abstract of
An Australian Consideration of Program Accreditation as a way of Filling the Gap from Minimum to High Quality Standards

Nadine L. McCrea
School of Early Childhood Studies
Brisbane College of Advanced Education
July, 1989

From the beginning of Australian early childhood programs there were individuals and groups that worked to establish not only minimum standards but to raise the existing practices and standards, "fill the gap", for young children. During the last 5 or 6 years, a number of Australian states have reviewed early childhood services and regulations. The Queensland Department of Family Services released A Green Paper on Child Care Regulations in late 1987 for the purpose of reviewing and replacing regulations. The community responded with more than 70 submissions and stated that the overall quality of early childhood programs should be uplifted. At that time, the Department was required to consider deregulation; so, as it began working on draft regulations it also considered options for ensuring quality. Voluntary program accreditation was one option, for which Nadine McCrea and Barbara Piscitelli were asked in August 1988 to prepare a consultancy proposal. Between January and May 1989 meetings and a teleconference were held, an Issues Paper was developed, distributed, and 74 responses were received, accreditation documents were developed from the NAEYC materials and an approach with costings was formulated. The following documents were compiled and presented to the Queensland Minister for Family Services: Handbook of High Quality Criteria for Early Childhood Programs; Guide to Self-Study and Accreditation of Early Childhood Programs; Voluntary Accreditation of Early Childhood Programs in Queensland, A Report to the Minister for Family Services; and a sample set of six colour-coded forms.

The accreditation process would be carried out by collaborative "studying", self-study, of an early childhood program across ten components with each being defined by a goal, a brief rationale, and several criteria. The ten components defined are: A. Interactions among staff and children; B. Curriculum/program for children; C. Interactions between staff and parents; D. Staff qualifications and development; E. Staffing patterns; F. Physical environment and setting; G. Health and safety factors; H. Food and nutrition issues; I. Management and administration; and J. Evaluation. This self-study step would be followed by validation and then accreditation consideration. There are many community benefits from a voluntary program accreditation system which builds upon clear regulations.

The self-study process facilitates staff development, parent education, and accountability to the community. The self-study process also raises awareness of appropriate program needs of young children. Accreditation is one way of "filling the gap" from minimum to high quality standards.

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CHILDHOOD IN THE 21ST CENTURY - HONG KONG, 1989
ISSUES IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

AN AUSTRALIAN CONSIDERATION OF PROGRAM ACCREDITATION AS A WAY OF FILLING THE GAP FROM MINIMUM TO HIGH QUALITY STANDARDS

Nadine L. McCrea
School of Early Childhood Studies
Brisbane College of Advanced Education
Kelvin Grove, Queensland Australia

1. The Australian Context for Standards

The provision of minimum standards for early childhood services either as mandatory state regulations or as departmental/organisational guidelines, is well established within Australia. There are, however, variations in these minimum standards from state to state across the country. From the beginning of Australian early childhood programs there were individuals and groups that worked to establish not only minimum standards but to raise the existing practices and standards, "fill the gap," for young children. The Australian Early Childhood Association (AECA) has encouraged and set high quality standards since its establishment fifty years ago. Initially, as the Australian Association for Preschool Child Development, it worked with the Commonwealth Department of Health to establish a demonstration early childhood program, a Lady Gowrie Child Centre, in each state capital during 1939 - 1940.

2. Accreditation as a way of Filling the Standards Gap

Australian early childhood services have been influenced since the turn of the century by international practices and people. The earliest and major influences came from the United States of America and England. Various early childhood practices, educational strategies, and standards have always been seriously considered by members of the field. However by the 1970's and 80's the early childhood field highlighted issues about minimum

and higher quality standards. Program qualities were examined and defined, and their influences on young children, especially under-threes, were interpreted in terms of potentially dangerous "gaps" in standards. Much of this program quality research occurred in the U.S.A. In Australia, the Watts and Patterson (1984) study at the Brisbane Lady Gowrie Child Centre examined and defined the dimensions of quality. As program "gaps" and qualities became clearer and major quality areas were carefully defined, the idea of identifying services with high quality programs evolved. The work of NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) provided high quality criteria and tasks for evaluating program strengths and areas needing change (Bredekamp 1987a, 1987b, 1987c).

3. The Queensland Accreditation Consultancy

3.1 Overview and Terms of Reference

The Children's Services (Day Care Centres) Regulations of 1973, modified in 1980, are the existing legislation for child care centres and community kindergartens in Queensland. The Queensland State Government released A Green Paper on Child Care Centre Regulations in late 1987 for the purpose of reviewing and replacing regulations where necessary with new regulations which:

- better reflect current standards and situations;
- are not seen to be inflexible, inhibiting and incapable of facilitating new approaches to the provision and integration of services for children;
- maintain parents' rights and responsibilities as their children's primary caregivers;
- do not negate valuable opportunities to promote the developmental needs of children. (Department of Family and Youth Services, Queensland. 1987, p. 2).

In response to the green paper, local communities held public meetings and a statewide Quality Child Care Forum was held in Brisbane in February 1988. The community, including individuals, early childhood services, and relevant organisations, also responded to the Minister's request for comments with more than 70 submissions. The Department received clear public advice, particularly from parents and early childhood organisations, that health, safety and protection standards for children in groups be maintained. Additionally, the community stated that the overall quality of early childhood programs should be uplifted, in other words the "gap needed filling". At that time, the Department was required by the Queensland Government's Regulatory Reform Strategy to also consider deregulation. Faced with this dilemma, the Government began working on draft regulations, as well as considering options for ensuring the quality of early childhood services. The idea of voluntary accreditation of programs was one option and in August 1988 Nadine McCrea and Barbara Piscitelli were asked to prepare a consultancy proposal to investigate such a voluntary child care centre accreditation system for Queensland.

The initial term of reference that the consultants were asked to examine was the application of the NAEYC accreditation system to Queensland with a view to making necessary changes to ensure its applicability. In November 1988, the consultancy plan was presented to a special meeting of the Queensland Branch of the AECA. The AECA member organisations endorsed the consultancy. The proposal outlined the need for thoughtful planning if an accreditation system was to become a reality. This included initial planning, the current consultancy, and provided for several other phases. **Phase 1 - The Planning Phase.** The consultancy was completed between January and May 1989. Briefly, the consultants:

- held community meetings and a statewide teleconference;
- developed an Issues Paper, distributed it and received responses;
- developed draft accreditation documents;
- formulated an approach to accreditation; and,
- estimated the costs of an accreditation system.

Phase 2 - The Trialling Phase. If the government decided to support the proposed accreditation system, this nine month phase would involve trialling the procedures and forms, in a sample of early childhood services across the State. In order to trial the system, several factors would need to be finalised; these include:

- adoption of trial accreditation system and documents;
- establishment of an accreditation authority;
- formulation of detailed operating policies and procedures;
- appointment of a trial manager on a contract basis;
- selection and training of validators, consulting advisors and commissioners;
- selection of a sample of early childhood services which reflect a cross-section of existing types within Queensland;
- implementation of the trial of the accreditation process;
- modification and general evaluation of the entire accreditation system after the trial;
- detailed cost analysis of accreditation of a single service and of the operation of the authority.

Phase 3 - The Implementing Phase. The decision to fully adopt the accreditation system, following the trial, would require careful consideration of many details. During this phase, the authority and its system would begin full operation.

Phase 4 - The Evaluating Phase. After a period of time, 2-3 years of full-scale operation, the validity, reliability, and general worth of the accreditation system would need to be reviewed (Bredekamp, 1986). This major evaluation would examine all elements of the authority, including the structure of the management body and the accreditation process; the content of the documents; the training of validators, consulting advisors and commissioners; the cost-effectiveness of the system in relation to maintaining and improving standards; and, the community's general perceptions of the process.

3.2 The Consultancy Process

In January 1989, the consultants began investigating the viability of a voluntary accreditation system for early childhood services in Queensland. Over twelve weeks we talked with individuals and early childhood associations on a state and national level about the concept of accrediting high quality early childhood programs. As a fundamental principle, we adopted an open discussion approach for all our activities. Initially a series of five information and discussion meetings were held with representatives from organisations with interests in the early childhood field. These groups were:

Australian Association of Early Childhood Educators (Qld Branch)

Australian Early Childhood Association (Qld) (AECA)

BCAE - School of Early Childhood Studies

Brisbane Ethnic Child-care Development Unit

Children and Family Services Network

Commonwealth Community Services and Health Department

Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland (C&K)

Early Childhood Resource Officers (Queensland Department of Family Services (DFS))

Institute of Health Surveyors

Kindercraft Child Care Association

Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Brisbane

Organisation of Child Care Associates

Playgroup Association of Queensland

Queensland Association of Teachers in Independent Schools

Queensland Childrens Activity Network

Queensland Community Child Care Association

Queensland Department of Education

Queensland Family Day Care Association

Queensland Professional Child Care Centres Association

Queensland TAFE Head Office (Child Care)

Save the Children Fund

The Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union of Australia (Qld)

The Local Government Association of Queensland

In addition, a teleconference linked up parents and professionals throughout the State to discuss the concept of accreditation. Cairns, Gladstone, Rockhampton, Southport (South Coast), Toowoomba (South West) and Townsville were linked for nearly two hours with Brisbane where the consultants, along with Gail Halliwell as moderator, discussed accreditation issues with about 60 people. During the meetings and teleconference, the consultants presented information about the NAEYC system for discussion of the possibilities of adapting the American model for the Australian context.

In addition, the consultants wrote and then distributed 1500 Issues Papers (McCrea and Piscitelli, 1989a) to those involved with early childhood services. The Issues Paper was distributed to all child care centres and community kindergartens in Queensland, local government officials, members of the health surveyors' association, all Queensland member organisations

of AECA, state branches and national headquarters of the AECA and Department of Family Services personnel. An advertisement was placed in the Saturday February 18, 1989 edition of the Brisbane Courier Mail to invite wider public response from the community to the Issues Paper. One month was provided for respondents to discuss the viability of voluntary accreditation, its relationship to mandated State regulations and also to comment on open-ended questions about its possible organisation, marketing, and its potential to "fill the standards gap". The questions were:

1. Which early childhood services will be eligible for accreditation?
2. Who will manage the accreditation system?
3. How will the community know about accreditation and recognise an accredited centre?
4. How much will it cost a centre to improve on regulation requirements to achieve accreditation standards?

The consultants reviewed the NAEYC accreditation documents, the literature related to the system and its operation. As a part of this task, we modified the NAEYC handbook, guide and operational system to reflect the local circumstances (Bredekamp, 1987a, 1987c). The NAEYC components of high quality were reorganised, modified and, in some cases, expanded to incorporate aspects of early childhood practices in Australia. Where appropriate, Australian standards were used in lieu of the American standards. AECA (1987) policy statements regarding staff-child ratios and staff qualifications were incorporated. St. John Ambulance Australia (Queensland) provided advice about first aid equipment and procedures for the appendices of our Handbook (McCrea and Piscitelli, 1989b). Outdoor learning and play environment safety standards from the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia were incorporated within an appendix

related to play equipment and materials. Additional guidelines on play equipment and materials were collated from standards set by the C&K, the Queensland Department of Children's Services (currently the DFS), and the Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health.

Further adaptations were made within the documents to reflect the working conditions and sociocultural context of Australia. In particular, recognition was given to the working conditions ensured by the various unions involved in the early childhood field. Many recommendations about safeguarding the working lives of Australian early childhood educators were reviewed and considered for the proposed system (Murray, 1986; Brennan and O'Donnell, 1986; Stonehouse, 1986, 1988; Watts and Patterson, 1984). Parental needs and concerns about the types of programs and their availability were reviewed in relation to the aspirations of Australian families in contemporary society (Ozanne-Smith and Sebastian, 1988; Lever, 1988; Edgar, 1988; Ochiltree, 1989).

One complex factor which required attention during modification of the NAEYC system was the demographic-geographic difference between the two countries (Thomas, 1986). The variation in local situations and the diversity of programs were acknowledged and carefully protected within the proposed system. In correspondence Sue Bredekamp the NAEYC Academy Director stated, "I do think that the concept of accreditation is very adaptable to different cultural contexts, particularly if the system models ours. Our system is designed for the extreme diversity and variety of early childhood programs that exist in the USA and works quite well" (Bredekamp, personal communication, 1988).

During the consultancy, various people were contacted to discuss the design and standards of the accreditation system. The National Director of the AECA was consulted regarding policy on staffing and staff-child ratios (Cahir, personal communication, 1989). Advice was also sought from the New South Wales and Victorian branches of AECA regarding their progress on accreditation as part of preparing for a national system. C&K staff provided advice about resources and quality standards within their association. Finally, we received advice from seventy-four submission responses to the Issues Paper. The respondents were: organisations with interests in early childhood services; staff and management committees from child care centres and kindergartens; shire and city councils; health surveyors and individuals. All of the above advice and information assisted us with identifying the "gaps" in standards and then completing a report for the minister and three accreditation documents.

3.3 **The Suggested Accreditation System - Framework, Process, Content**

Framework. The accreditation system was developed with the following framework or foundation. **Accreditation** is a process whereby a person or a program is furnished with a valid certificate which verifies the meeting of stated requirements. Accreditation of early childhood services is a system, run by an independent authority, which clearly defines quality program criteria and builds on mandatory State regulations or similar guidelines for services not covered by regulations. Thus, accreditation is one way of "filling the gap" from minimum to high quality standards. A voluntary accreditation system provides services with a professionally recognised seal of approval.

An accreditation system should provide achievable quality guidelines for the early childhood field, rather than unrealistic ideals. With a well

developed self-study step, an accreditation system provides meaningful self-development opportunities. The self-study process facilitates staff development, parent education, and accountability to the community. Ultimately, a well defined and well publicised accreditation system also raises general community awareness and removes guess work from choosing services. The procedures and criteria should be flexible enough to cater for various early childhood services and settings, and also recognise cultural and social differences (Thomas, 1986). A well designed and carefully marketed accreditation system has much to offer the early childhood field and the community at large. An accreditation system should:

- facilitate children's development;
- encourage ongoing commitment to higher quality programs for children;
- help the early childhood field (staff, parents, local government officials, state government officers, early childhood resource and advisory staff) identify more clearly high quality program components and criteria;
- assist adults with their professional and personal development as they participate in the self-study step;
- increase communication within individual early childhood services and strengthen staff team-building;
- help unite the early childhood field and break down feelings of isolation which many staff experience;
- encourage and empower staff towards increasingly mature professional responsibility;
- raise community awareness, by establishing a common language for identifying and defining aspects of early childhood services;
- help improve the professional standing of the early childhood field;
- provide a springboard for real and lasting program awareness and improvements;

. build upon existing regulations/guidelines and clearly delineate the distinctions in kind and quality between regulations and accreditation.

Accreditation is a form of advocacy (Goffin and Lombardi, 1988) within the early childhood field because program improvement is surely a positive change to help children grow.

The goals of the accreditation authority would be: to assist staff and parents in identifying the quality aspects of early childhood programs; to facilitate changes and improvements in programs; to provide professional external validation with appropriate recognition of high quality early childhood programs; and, to promote general community awareness and knowledge of high quality criteria.

The foundations of an accreditation system differ from the regulation procedures and roles of inspection, licensing and staff approval in several ways (Fig. 1). Firstly, services need to already be licensed as a prerequisite to seeking accreditation. Secondly, accreditation is voluntary not mandatory. Thirdly, accreditation involves a major step of self-study, a formative, on-going evaluation process, which is not incorporated into regulations/licensing systems. Fourthly, a service decides when and if it is ready to seek accreditation.

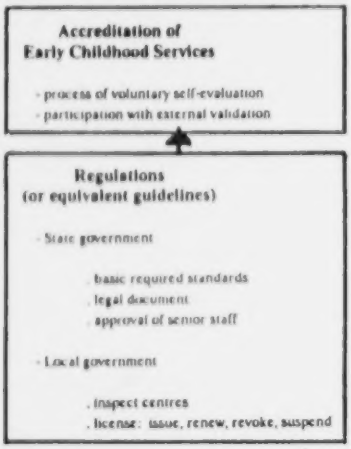

Fig. 1. Summary of accreditation and regulation (or equivalent guidelines) of early childhood services.

Even though accreditation would be voluntary, the high quality criteria materials should be available to all early childhood services who wish to have staff and parents work together on program self-study. In the future, criteria modifications and extensions should include playgroups, school age child care programs, and family day care schemes. To be eligible to seek accreditation, a service would need to: be currently licensed or if exempt from licensing demonstrate that its standards are equivalent; enrol ten or more children; and, have been in operation for at least one full year.

Process. The accreditation process would involve three steps. Early childhood services would decide to make use of the high quality criteria materials and to participate in external validation and accreditation. Materials (McCrea & Piscitelli, 1989b, 1989c) would be obtained from the Early Childhood Accreditation Council (ECAC) (Fig. 2). The accreditation process is a tool for learning and change, particularly self-initiated growth and empowerment.

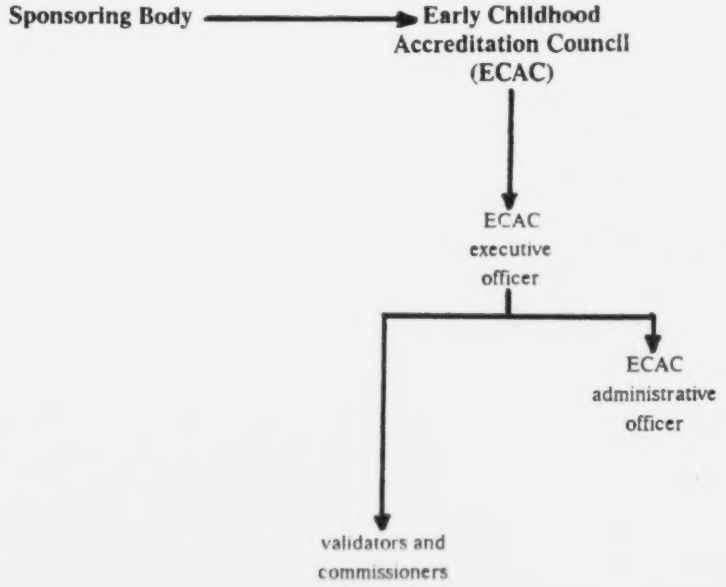

Fig. 2. Overview of the Accreditation Authority

The **self-study step** would have an open time frame from starting the process until actually requesting accreditation. Early childhood services might decide to undertake the self-study step and not seek formal accreditation from the Council. This step would involve a service in several tasks; adults would jointly:

. decide to participate in accreditation;
. apply to the Council, pay an application fee, and receive the self-study materials;
. conduct the self-study; and,
. confirm and change the service's program.

The adults involved would include the owner or administrator, the committee of management, the director, staff and parents. This step would be a collaborative one, not based on an individual, and all would work together. The self-study materials would include observation forms for the staff and director to complete for each indoor and outdoor area, an administration report, and both staff and parent questionnaires. Self-study would help the adults examine their service's operations and identify program strengths as well as weaknesses. This step might take several months to carefully and fully complete.

The **report and validation step** would include the following tasks for the director: complete the Program Description form; report to the Council; request a validation visit (pay fees); and, work with the validator during the on-site visit. On-site visits would take at least one day to complete and the outside person would be a regional validator. A validator's role would be to **validate** by observation a service's self-study information as an accurate reflection of what happens within the program. Validators would not be enforcers, inspectors, on-going monitors, nor outside assessors.

The **accreditation decision step** would take place at the Council headquarters, where a commission of three early childhood professionals would consider the reports of the service and the validator, and make a decision to accredit or defer the program. The Council would not use a rating scale during the accreditation decision. Instead, services would either be granted accreditation or deferred until certain components of their programs were brought up to an accrediting standard, the "gaps were filled". This type of endorsement would encourage services to work towards higher standards throughout the self-study step, and prior to submitting requests for validation. Accreditation would be valid for a maximum of three years and then renewal would be needed.

Content. The accreditation process would be carried out by the collaborative "studying" of an early childhood program across ten components. Each component, or aspect of an early childhood service, is defined by a goal, a brief rationale, and several criteria (McCrea & Piscitelli, 1989b). The ten components are:

A. Interactions among staff and children

B. Curriculum/program for children

C. Interactions between staff and parents

D. Staff qualifications and development

E. Staffing patterns

F. Physical environment and setting

G. Health and safety factors

H. Food and nutrition issues

I. Management and administration

J. Evaluation

One example is the **Food and nutrition** issues component which is defined as follows:

Goal: The nutritional needs of children and adults are met in a manner that promotes physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Rationale: Children need adequate nutrition, including a wide variety of foods. Children can learn about foods and meal expectations during the early childhood years.

Criteria:

H-1. Meals and snacks are planned to meet children's nutritional needs in proportion to the amount of time in the program each day.
The centre may provide food or parents might as long as they are informed regarding well-balanced meals (see H-4).

H-2. Menu information is provided for all parents. Eating times and details of foods eaten are provided to parents of infants and toddlers at the end of each day and to parents of other children as appropriate.
Parents need to know not only what is planned but also what is actually served and eaten. This is particularly true for very young children who cannot communicate about foods (see C-1, C-3).

H-3. Mealtimes promote healthy nutrition habits. Toddlers and 3 to 5 year-olds are encouraged to serve and feed themselves. Sufficient space is provided during eating times and chairs, tables, and eating utensils are suitable for the developmental levels of the children. Eating times

are pleasant social and learning experiences for children. Foods from the children's cultural backgrounds, as well as from other cultures, are served. At least one adult sits with children during meals. Infants are held in an inclined position during bottle feeding.

Meal times need to be pleasant activities in calm settings which encourage conversation and foster independence. Adults interact with children during meals to provide a model of healthy nutrition habits. Bottles for infants must not be propped since this is potentially dangerous. Feeding times for infants should be times of warm, affectionate, human contact during both milk feeds and the introduction of solids (see **B-7, C-4,** Appendix C).

H-4. Food brought from home is stored appropriately until consumed.

Readily perishable or readily contaminated foods and drinks are refrigerated at or below 4°C. All readily perishable or readily contaminated hot foods are kept at 60°C or above. Frozen foods are stored at -18°C or below.

H-5. Where food is prepared on the premises, the centre is in compliance with legal requirements for providing foods. Food may be prepared at an approved facility and transported to the program in sanitary containers and at safe and healthy temperatures.

The centre demonstrates compliance with state and local government requirements for early childhood services which provide foods.

H-6. Food Education opportunities are planned and provided to facilitate positive and meaningful learning experiences for young children.

Food learning experiences, in the broadest sense, encompass all contacts children have with foods. These contacts may be formal or informal, during eating time or within play; however, food experiences usually are defined as part of the planned or spontaneous curriculum and may vary from introducing solids and serving finger foods for infants to gardening, shopping and preparing foods with older toddlers and 3 to 5 year-olds (see B-7).

4. Since The Consultancy

In Queensland. In early May, the consultants met with the Queensland Minister for Family Services and the Director-General of the Department of Family Services to hand-over copies of the completed documents and to briefly discuss the consultancy and our findings. The documents presented to the Minister were: Handbook of High Quality Criteria for Early Childhood Programs; Guide to Self-Study and Accreditation of Early Childhood Programs; Voluntary Accreditation of Early Childhood Programs in Queensland, A Report to the Minister for Family Services; sample sets of six colour-coded forms, and the community submissions about the Issues Paper. In late May, the Minister decided to release copies of the Report (McCrea & Piscitelli, 1989d) to those who had made submissions to the Issues Paper (McCrea & Piscitelli, 1989a). One hundred copies of the Report were printed and distributed in early June. The Minister commented in his cover letter..."I will take into account the findings of the Early Childhood Consultancy Team when examining the options available for the future monitoring of standards in child care centres" (Sherrin, letter, 1989).

Around Australia. In late June, the AECA National Office organised a meeting about accreditation with representatives coming from New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, and the national office. The meeting considered the progress in each state, various areas of concern and collaboration so far, and ways of ensuring that a national accreditation system is established. Further details and action plans for a national accreditation scheme will be decided in September at the annual AECA National Council meeting.

5. **Filling the Gap - Policy Development and Implementation**

Professional Associations. The idea and ideal of the early childhood field "growing up", taking professional responsibility for defining high quality standards, and also promoting and sponsoring those standards in a variety of ways including through an accreditation system are now nearly a reality. Groups like the Australian Early Childhood Association and the Australian Association of Early Childhood Educators (AAECE) need to clearly state policies about minimum requirements for all children in group settings and then "fill the gap" with policy statements about high quality practices and standards for the early childhood field (Katz, 1984). Clear policies need to be specific and detailed - who?, what?, where?, when?, why?, how? (Kendrick, 1988). AECA, AAECE, and other organisations, including tertiary institutions and the relevant unions, must plan ways of encouraging and implementing higher quality programs on a solid base of monitored appropriate regulations. For proper implementation and accountability of both regulations and accreditation, the commitment to do what is right rather than expedient (Katz, 1977) must come from within individuals and the profession collectively. Commitment,

especially to the new or different - that is change, is a high ideal and hard work for some. But, the demand for basic protection and the wish for higher overall quality programs must be the impetus for this ongoing commitment to the early childhood field - "... doing the right thing at the right time for the right reasons" (Spodek, 1987, p.68).

Governments. Governments at all levels - local councils, state departments and ministers, and Commonwealth portfolios - must ensure the basic protection, health, safety and nutrition of young children in groups outside their own homes. Appropriate government policies are the basis for staffing and financing these serious responsibilities. There are concerns about current policies and responsibilities in various states; I have referred to some regulations as "surely an example of Swiss cheese legislation" (McCrea, in press). Each level of government should also be able to, at least, promote and encourage early childhood services to move beyond the basics. There should be no conflict of interest in providing the basics, regulations and their monitoring, recognising them as such, and publicly acknowledging the "gap" to higher quality standards and their value. Hopefully, in time, government policies will include material support and finance for some of the high quality work within the early childhood field. Hopefully, this Australian consideration of voluntary program accreditation will become a national reality in the near future.

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